

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is John Willis. I am a resident of New Haven. I am testifying in support of SB4, including the winter eviction moratorium and the limit on rental application fees.

I am a recent graduate of Yale Divinity School, and while I testified last week from my position as a renter in support of HB6588, today I want to speak from my position as a theologian and a minister in support of SB4.

Since I spoke to you all last week, I've been thinking a lot about a parable told by Jesus that many of you may be familiar with: the parable of the Good Samaritan.

One day, Jesus is asked by a lawyer how to get to heaven. Jesus replies with the Golden rule: "love God, and love your neighbor as yourself."

But the lawyer was a proud man, and so he replied to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus responds with the parable. He tells of a man who is beaten and robbed and left for dead on the side of the road. Two very powerful, respected people pass the suffering man by and do nothing. Maybe they thought "his individual bad decisions led him here" or "if the government would just keep their hands off our money, the Market would've helped him." Regardless, they saw and heard someone suffering and homeless, and they did nothing.

Instead, it was someone despised by society — a Samaritan — who recognized that the beaten man needed help. The Samaritan saw the suffering for what it was — an injustice that he could do something about. And so he helps the man find shelter and care.

Jesus asks the lawyer, "which of these 3 was a neighbor to the beaten man?" and the lawyer replies correctly, "the one who showed him mercy."

To love your neighbor, Jesus says, is to show them mercy when they are suffering.

Legislators, you are in a position today not different from the three people who passed by the beaten, homeless man. You have heard over and over from renters suffering and on the verge of destitution. You have seen with your own eyes the homeless on the street, sleeping on sidewalks, begging for help — abandoned and discarded by our for-profit housing system.

And you have a choice today and in this legislative session how you will respond to the cry of us tenants who are hurting — to those you have literally passed by on the street who have been beaten down by the brutality of the free market.

What does Jesus say it means for you to love your neighbor? What is the response to the suffering of your fellow human beings?

*Mercy.*

*It's mercy.*

That is what we are asking of you when we advocate for SB4. We need a winter eviction moratorium, limits on application fees, an end to no-cause eviction by establishing good-cause eviction protections, and we need the rent cap that was originally part of this bill to be added back in. We are asking for you to look upon our suffering and respond not with long-winded pontification about the market and the effects on the rich landlords making money off of us, but with mercy.

The Good Samaritan saw the homeless, suffering man and responded as a neighbor with mercy.

Go and do likewise.